

With the Prince of Wales and the Harem Beauties

No Traveler Has Ever Had the Remarkable Opportunity to Meet and Study the Romantic Women of Mysterious and Age Old India That Are Now Being Enjoyed by the Prince of Wales. The Smiling Edward Is Seeing Strange Sights in India.



Inside the beautiful palace of the Maharaja of Manipur there are many strange sights, but none so strange to Western eyes as dancing of the Maharaja's pretty slave girls before the royal Prince from England.

NO traveler has ever had the remarkable opportunity to meet and study the romantic women of mysterious, age old culture that is now being granted to the Prince of Wales. Smiling Prince Edward is seeing strange sights in old India, but nothing, certainly, so strange and unusual as the lovely, glamorous, hourlike ladies of the sacredly guarded zenanas, into which this charming young man has been permitted to peep because of the privileges he has as the "Prince of Princes."

The Prince of Wales has more adequate facilities for seeing the wonderful things of this vast, unknown expanse than any other man has ever had. The ordinary traveler can never hope to see the sights "behind the veils" which are brought forth by the Indian rajahs and maharajas in the hope that they might interest the white Prince. Whatever he may have a whim to gaze upon, the Indian potentates have no other course than to fulfill, and even anticipate, his least desire.

A white man's eyes seldom rest upon the innermost household of an Indian ruler. But the smiling Prince may see whatever he likes from the seaport cities of Madras to Mandalay, in Burma. Beautiful women who have never danced before any others than their masters are brought out in shimmering regalia to attain new terpsichorean heights in their strangely beautiful and graceful art of lithe, expressive rhythm of movement for the approval of the personable Prince whose skin is white.

To win a smile from this youth is their aim, and perhaps they dance with greater wantonness and abandon and more primitive grace, because they know that he, like the modern raja, is a merciful judge and that a frown from him will be the only punishment for failure to win his approval. Once, long ago, in the days of the Great Moguls, such dances as the Prince sees on his travels were dances where life and death were the rewards and punishments.

The Great Moguls! How like the title of some Oriental fairy tale do those words sound! How like the name of some unbelievable legend! But no part of all the great land of India remains so intact as does the expanse which once was the domain of the Great Moguls. The city of Agra, gleaming white marble, a monument to a geometry which antedated the geometry of the Greeks! It is the same city which was the capital of the Mogul Empire centuries ago. It is one of the many places uncontaminated by Western civilization. It is Indian, old, mystic, magic, lovely.

The Prince of Wales saw it not so long ago. He saw there a wonderful sight. He saw the time old game of "human chess," a game that lives to exemplify the voluptuous glamour of Indian life in the high caste as it was when the Great Mogul Akbar sat in power on the black marble throne in the blood red palace high above the sacred River Jumna. High up toward the sky the Great Moguls lived in alham-

At right—
Prettiest of the
far famed
Manipur dancing
girls.

bras of white lace marblework—fairlyland palaces—far above everything, inaccessible and secluded, the Great Moguls and their sinuous sultanas.

And in Agra the Prince of Wales has stood with a successor of Akbar and played the game of "chess" which in those old days was played with life or death the stake. His smile or his impassive face was reward or punishment for the lovely, full curved slave women who were the human pawns that day the young Prince bade them move over the great chess board marked out under a white dome in Agra.

Let a chronicler who is a high authority tell of the game as played four centuries ago in the days of another gallant cavalier, Jean Baptiste:

The cavalier has come far, even from the court of Louis the Magnificent, in distant France. From Sultan to Czar he had gone in his travels into regions little known, and from them he had passed into the land of the Great Mogul, which then was territory wholly strange to Christian eyes.

Marvelous, indeed, were the things Jean Baptiste had seen—enough to make tales rivaling those of the Scheherazade, of whom he had heard at Bagdad. He could tell, for example, of a game he had played with Akbar the Mogul himself, which quite resembled his familiar chess, at which he was expert in the salons of his native Paris. But of this game with Akbar he could say, and enjoy the incredulous stares of those who should be his listeners, that it was not with wooden men he played across the geometric squares but with live slave girls from the Imperial Zenana. Each had been chosen for her lotus eyed beauty and for her skill in interpreting the slightest signal of the master who moved her about from square to square.

As the climax to this particular tale he could tell of the stake Akbar fixed for him—the same as for other specially honored guests at his lavish court. When he won his beautiful human pawns were his reward—to scold or fondle as he liked; when he lost it was his cost that he should sit quite still while the eunuchs of his royal host assembled at his feet his weeping chess and strangled them one by one.

Certainly the mild and gentle Prince of Wales could no more take the ancient re-

ward than he could permit the old time stake of defeat to be effected. But one must wonder with us all whether the lithe bodies of the lovely native maidens were not more quick to move to win this smile than were those of women of centuries ago tense and alert under the stress of fear of death.

At any rate the Prince won, and smiled. Follow the Prince to Baroda and Udaipur, to Calcutta and Bombay, to Rangoon and Mandalay. Wherever he goes the ruling chiefs are much impressed and completely won by him. Consequently they exert themselves far more than Indian princes are wont to do to give their visiting ruler unusual insight into the richest of their life.

In Mandalay a few days ago he went to the Shan camp, where nine Sawbwas—chiefs—were presented to him. These rulers had arranged a whole series of weird tribal dances, more expressive of their sinuous bearings toward the "scheme of things entire" than any written word—any epicurean *Rubaiyat*—could ever be.

Adjoining the Shan kingdom of Pong is Manipur, where the most beautiful of India's women are. The Manipuri women are Mongolian in facial characteristics and have a regularity of form and feature beautiful to see. Some are nearly white. These women have a caste of their own and are the most independent in India. They are not women of the zenanas, for they have duties to perform aside from the duties of wifehood and motherhood.

The Manipur Nautch girls are famous, and the British Prince has been privileged to see them at their dancing. The Nautch girls are ballet maidens, trained with an intensity and in a union of movement such as would be beyond the reach of the best of our music show choruses. Manipur is proud of them, and they are selected for many qualities. Beauty is one of these. Manipur women are the most beautiful in India, and the most beautiful of the Manipur women are chosen for potential Nautch girls.

But they must have more than beauty. They must have grace and ease and lithe-ness of movement. Their every gesture must be effortless, yet unmechanical—for that is human grace. Moreover, they must have voices which are pleasing. The dance technique of the Nautch girls is somewhat like the technique of our ultra modern dancers; that is, the Nautch girls' dance is accomplished by sinuous movements of the body and expressive gestures of the limbs, while the stance is practically immovable.

One of the most interesting sights the Prince of Wales has seen was a prearranged "tamasha" at Calcutta for his special benefit, where the pick of the Manipur Nautch girls danced before him in shimmering array. The rich fields of Manipur furnished their richest garments, and the most beautiful of the Manipur maidens wore the glittering garb in eloquent scantiness. Not only did they dance, they sang their native airs.

Part of the Great Show Were Tibetans in Masks

As a part of this same "tamasha" a corps of Tibetans from the foot of the Himalayas marched before the Prince in ghastly, grotesque masks of their own design. Some were arrayed as skeletons, and others wore their tribal fete day costumes, which consist mostly of daubed colors. The fact is, Tibetan women would need no masks to make them grotesque, for, in contrast with the lovely Nautch girls, they appear so to the most sympathetic eyes.

In Bikanir one night the Prince saw another troupe of Nautch girls. In the great hall at Bikanir, unroofed and open to the sky, he saw the weirdest of all performances in the Nautch girls' repertoire. Their setting was illuminated by thousands of tiny purple lamps, and the girls wore gorgeous gold and colored costumes twined about them to bring out every line and curve of statuesque loveliness.

And then one of the most beautiful of their number executed a fantastic sword dance, treading on spikes, saws and knives without the least injury or discomfort apparently. Bikanir and barbaric spectacles seemed enchantingly unreal to the Prince, but equally enchanting were the gorgeous

pageants arranged for him by the Gaekwar of Baroda, the Maharana and Maharaj-Kumar of Udaipur and the young Maharaja of Jodhpur.

Everywhere there have been grand pageants of color, movement, music and light—"swarming populations, marchings and processions, princely jewels and sumptuous cloths and tissues, troops in brilliant uniforms, from the half wild horsemen and armorclad warriors of the Middle Ages to the superbly trained and magnificently equipped regiments of to-day; weird throbings of native drums and the clanging temple bells," aggregations of beautiful native women who risk the wrath of their gods to gaze upon the face of the charming young Prince of Wales; blazing sun by day on drab land, sinister jungle foliage and gleaming white houses, kites circling lazily overhead, and clear, crystal nights with jackals howling in the starlight.

India of the Native States at its best! All the survivals of bygone centuries! Ancient magnificence!

Mandalay and the entertainment given by the Shan chieftains there have been mentioned. First in the pageant prepared for the Prince came the grotesque masque of the beasts with clowning llamas, elephants and other animals. Then came the dance of the peacock girls. This latter event was something, indeed, to remember. The most perfect of the Shan women in the

"Royal eyes that have seen more than is given other eyes to look upon."
H. R. H. the Prince of Wales, to whom have been displayed many wonderful sights by the Oriental Princes of India.



Ladies of the harem of the ruler of Nipal, who for the first time in the history of their court were allowed to come out of the Zenana to meet a Masou line visitor—the Prince of Wales.



Aside from this, the life of the woman of the zenana is a monotony of trivial duties, petty acts and idleness.

There is no doubt that they have their dream heroes. They can scarcely know a great deal about the events taking place in the great world outside; but what slave girl or what woman behind the veil in all India has not heard it whispered about that the "Great White Prince," the charming, smiling, good looking, youthful Prince of Wales is seeing India? And what girl is there among them all who has not drawn a picture of him in her fancy, and who has not prayed to her gods that she may see the young Prince face to face?

They are a romantic lot, these women of India. Romance and the glamour of romantic settings circumscribe the life of the Indian woman. Romance is her justification for living. Her education and her religious training are no more than preparation for the assumption of the marital relation. And even in that relation she is doomed to be practically buried alive unless nature has granted her a body more beautiful than that of any other of the zenana; then she will be a favorite wife until her beauty fades. She will be supplanted by another inevitably.

Usual Age for Marriage Is About Twelfth Year

In India the age of marriage for a girl is usually about 12 years; for at that age the Indian girl has attained her perfection of physical womanhood. The marriage ceremony is the height of success to the Indian bride. On no other occasion than that of the marriage ceremony can the woman become the center of an event of religious significance. The father of the bride prepares the background for the ceremony, and it is the greatest expense he has to bear in life. The father is disgraced unless his daughter becomes a wife.

The Prince has seen several bridal processions and has found some of them most impressive. In Benares, the sacred city where the fearsome goddess Kali has her blood red temple, a marriage procession is a glorious sight. Plaintive music precedes the procession. Then come belled dancers—girls in shimmering gowns that lightly whip their bodies as they dance to the tinkling of their own cymbals. Next the bridal pair, faces hidden by veils of jessa-

The favorite dancing girls of the Maharaja of Mandalay. Two famous Indian beauties, who never before danced for a foreigner. They are shown posing for the first figure in the wild, tempestuous dance, done especially for the Prince in the palace courtyard.



array of glorified peacocks, postured and coquetted and led themselves into gentle expressionism of the most primitive, and native as well as exotic emotions to the accompaniment of strange, rhythmical music.

The most inviolable of all precincts is the home of the high caste Indian. The apartments of the women are quite secluded, the windows almost invariably looking out on the inner court of the house; never looking out on a street. The wives are closely confined, and to visit the zenana the husband's permission must be obtained. The higher his position the more unwilling is he likely to be to permit

strange eyes to gaze upon his wives, or even upon his slave girls.

But the women of the zenanas are eager for freedom. They are not inordinately happy in their mass confinement. There are few diversions, and they must be so utterly subservient to the master's will that their personalities all are submerged in that one man. The master, wearied of them all save one and keeping that one in his own quarter of the palace, becomes far less than a hero in the eyes of the "shut-in outcasts."

They may have music and dancing, but these diversions do not remain diversions if too often called upon to make life interesting for the "girls behind the curtain."